

## IDEA GUIDE



VISITLEX

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# STRAIGHT, OR WITH A SPLASH OF HISTORY

*However You Take It, A Bourbon Tour  
of the Bluegrass Is a Spirited Good Time*

*"Let dreamers whine/Of the pleasures of wine/For lovers of soft delight/But this is the song/Of a tippie that's strong/For men who must toil and fight./Now the drink of luck/For the man full of pluck/Is easy to nominate/It's the good old whiskey of old Kentuck/And you always drink it straight..."*  
a 19th-century Kentucky poem, *The Ballad of Whiskey Straight*.

Tour a Bluegrass bourbon distillery and you'll not only learn how bourbon is made, but you'll start to understand why the "good old whiskey of old Kentuck" has inspired pride, passion (and even poetry) among Kentuckians.

Bourbon is America's only native spirit. And almost all bourbon — 95% according to the Kentucky Distillers Association — is produced in Kentucky. Kentucky Bourbon is the number one spirit the US exports, with \$450 million in shipments abroad in 2017. There are currently about 7.5 million barrels aging in Kentucky warehouses.

Like the story of Kentucky itself, the story of Kentucky bourbon began in the Bluegrass region. And what a story it is: Visit distilleries, historic sites and other Bluegrass places with a bourbon connection and you'll encounter such fascinations as the "white dog" and the "angel's share." You'll hear how Kentuckians ranging from a cantankerous Baptist minister to a feisty school teacher

changed the course of bourbon history. (And don't forget that famous hatchet-wielding temperance leader!) You'll also meet modern-day Kentuckians and Kentucky families who continue the state's most spirited tradition.

## Distillery Tours

The heady aromas of yeast and grain; the glimmer of copper and steel tanks; the cool and almost eerie quiet of warehouses where row upon row of wooden barrels stretch into the darkness... These are some of the sights, smells and sensations of touring a bourbon distillery.

Six historic distilleries in the Lexington area have regular tour programs. Like the brands of bourbon they produce, the distilleries themselves have distinct personalities. Admission, how tours are handled, what the tour includes, and the approaches to production vary from distillery to distillery.

Unless you're bringing a group of ten or more, reservations are not necessary. Bring your camera — you can take all the photos you like. Children are welcome. The tours involve a fair amount of walking, some of it outdoors, and stair-climbing, so wear comfortable shoes. Your tour

group may include some international visitors. Along with the United States, Australia, Japan and Germany are bourbon-loving countries, according to the Kentucky Distillers Association.

**Bluegrass Note:** Whiskey was made as early as medieval times by Irish and Scottish monks who distilled grains in pursuit of a rejuvenating "water of life." In the early American colonies whiskey was made with rye and used as a medicine and a general aid to well-being. Kentucky settlers gave whiskey several new twists, beginning with corn, which was abundant since settlers could claim 400 acres if they built a cabin and grew a patch of corn. As early as 1775, enterprising Kentuckians were making corn whiskey. (Today, by definition, bourbon is a whiskey made from a mash containing at least 51 percent corn.) By the mid-1800s Kentucky distillers had developed other distinguishing characteristics, such as aging the whiskey in charred new barrels and using sour mash starter to gain consistent high quality from batch to batch. Some people credit the Bluegrass' limestone water with giving bourbon its smooth taste.

**The Woodford Reserve Distillery.** This restored historic distillery in Woodford County, is a showplace of the distiller's art and Kentucky bourbon heritage.

A small, picturesque distillery nestled along Glenn's Creek at the site where Elijah Pepper (one of the famous early Bluegrass distillers) set up his distillery in 1812, their tours give visitors a sense of what bourbon making was like in the 1800s. With its small-scale production, old-fashioned copper pot stills, longer fermenting and distilling time, and hand-bottling, Woodford Reserve bourbon is made much as Pepper's bourbon was in the 1800s.

The tour, leisurely in pace and sprinkled with fascinating distilling history and terms, covers the process from sour mash starter to "farewell" (the residue of aroma left in an empty barrel). The tour begins and ends at the Visitors Center, where a long porch offers a scenic overlook of the whole operation. A small bus transports you to the distillery buildings. The large gift shop includes a wide variety of Kentucky crafts.

The Woodford Reserve Distillery is open to visitors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays with tours on the hour starting at 10 a.m. with the last tour at 3 p.m. Open seasonally on Sundays (March through December) with tours at 1, 2 and 3 p.m. These tours are \$20. The Bourbon Legacy tour requires a reservation and is offered on Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m. Admission is \$50. You can enjoy a gourmet lunch in the Glenn's Creek Cafe from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and on Sundays from noon until 4 p.m.

Set amid horse farms, Woodford Reserve is a scenic drive from Lexington via US 60 (Versailles Road). Shortly after passing the US 60/Ky. 1685 intersection, turn left onto Grassy Spring Road (3360); when the road dead ends turn right onto McCracken Pike. The Woodford Reserve Distillery is on the left. (859) 879-1812.

**Wild Turkey Distillery.** Although the Wild Turkey brand of bourbon wasn't introduced until 1952 (supposedly

**Bluegrass Note:** Want to visit several distilleries without the hassle of driving? Arrange transportation through Horse and Barrel Tours (859) 797-3605 and Mint Julep Tours (502) 583-1433. Taxi companies will offer a flat rate for a day of visiting area distilleries.

bourbon and bourbon making at this site at the Kentucky River near Lawrenceburg goes back to the mid 19th-century.

The tour you take today reveals an intriguing combination of tradition and mod-

ern mass production. In the fermentation room, 70-year-old cypress tanks stand next to modern stainless steel ones. If you happen to run into Master Distiller Jimmy Russell in the warehouse and hear him talk about the time and personal effort that went into developing just the right mix of aging for the "Rare Breed" barrel proof bourbon - "Jimmy's pride and joy," your guide explains - you're reminded that many aspects of fine bourbon making will always be low tech.

Your visit begins and ends at the visitor center and gift shop. You can take home everything from a keychain to an amusing T-shirt to collector decanters featuring the Wild Turkey turkey.

Tours are given Monday through Saturday on the hours starting at 9 a.m. The last tour of the day is at 4 p.m. Open seasonally on Sundays as well (March through December) with the first tour at 11 a.m. and the last tour at 3 p.m. Closed on major holidays. In the summer months, the tour might not include the fermentation room. The "Barrel to Bottle" tour is \$11; free to those under 21 and to members of the military with ID.

To get there from Lexington, take a scenic drive along US 60 West to Versailles, then US 62 West to the distillery near Lawrenceburg. The distillery is about 23 miles west of Lexington at 1417 Versailles Road. (502)-839-2182.

**Buffalo Trace.** Chicken isn't the only Kentucky product that has resulted from a Colonel's secret recipe. At Buffalo Trace distillery, north of Frankfort, you'll see a statue of Albert Bacon Blanton. The son of Benjamin Blanton, who began making whiskey at this location along the Kentucky River in the late 1860s, Albert started working at the distillery in 1897 at age 16. Over the next 55 years, "Colonel Blanton," as he was called (reflecting his membership in the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels), guided Buffalo Trace through growth and modernization that made it one of America's leading distilleries.

As you enter Buffalo Trace you'll notice the stone Rock Hill Mansion where Albert Blanton lived. A scenic courtyard surrounds a picturesque log "Clubhouse" used for special events. The standard tour begins at the gift shop and includes a warehouse and a small bottling house where the distillery's popular "single-barrel" bourbons—Blanton's, Rock Hill Farms, Hancock's Reserve and Elmer T. Lee — are bottled and sealed by hand. Buffalo Trace introduced the single-barrel bourbon concept in 1984. As the name implies, this is a bottling of whiskey drawn from one carefully selected barrel, instead of being mingled with

**Bluegrass Note:** Bourbon making is full of colorful terms. The mash of fermenting grains is called "Beer." After distilling, but before it is barreled, bourbon is clear, like vodka. At Wild Turkey Distillery they call this "white dog." (The charring of the barrel adds the color through the aging process.) Most distilleries age their products four to 12 years. Each year of aging, about three percent of the bourbon in the barrel is lost to evaporation or to leaching into the barrel itself; this bourbon that disappears before bottling is called the "angel's share."

named because the hunting partners of then-company president Thomas McCarthy loved the bourbon he always brought along on their annual turkey shoot), the lineage of

whiskey from other barrels.

Buffalo Trace gives “Trace Tours” Monday through Saturday on the hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tours on Sundays from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. Tours are free. Call (502) 223-7641 for information. Ask about the “Hard Hat Tour.” Offered seasonally (ages 12 and up only) this tour includes an exciting insider’s look at the entire distilling process. The “National Historic Landmark Tour” is offered Monday through Friday at 11:30 a.m. and focuses on the architecture and the building expansion that occurred from 1933 to 1953. All tours are complimentary. The distillery is located north of Frankfort on US 421, about 27 miles northwest of Lexington.

#### Four Roses Distilling

**Company.** Four Roses near Lawrenceburg, gives tours to individuals and small groups Mondays through Saturdays on the hour from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Sundays noon to 3 p.m. The 45 minute tour costs \$10 and gives a “roll-up-your-sleeves” look at the fermentation and distillation processes. (The bourbon is sent to another location for barrelling and aging.) Exclusively exported for over 40 years, Four Roses Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey is now for sale in Kentucky and Indiana. The distillery is located in an unusual California Spanish Mission-style building constructed around 1910. Call (502) 839-3436 to schedule your tour. The distillery stops production in the summer.

**Town Branch Distillery.** Alltech’s distillery is right downtown, steps away from Rupp Arena and the Central Bank Center. Alltech’s founder Dr. Pearse Lyons acquired the 200-year-old Lexington Brewing Company in 1999 and resurrected a brewing and distilling tradition that dates back to 1794. It is the first distillery to be built in Lexington in nearly 100 years. Their Kentucky Bourbon is called Town Branch. The Bourbon distillery is on the campus of Alltech’s Lexington Brewing and Distilling Company, and tours also include a peek at the brewery that produces Kentucky Ale and Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale. Tours cost \$12 and you’ll have a chance to sample four of the eight products produced on site. Visitor Center open Monday through Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sundays 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tours are on the hour with the last tour at 4 p.m. Call (859) 255-2337.

**James E. Pepper Distilling Co.** In Lexington’s popular Distillery District, this distillery occupies the same building as the one built in 1879. Flamboyant entrepreneur Colonel James E. Pepper (1850-1906) was a third generation distiller from a family that began producing Bourbon during the American Revolution. His Lexington operation was at one point the largest whiskey distillery in the United

States. Take a tour and see the distillery’s intriguing copper column still. (859) 309-3230.

## A New Generation

**Craft distilleries on the rise.** The making of a fine bourbon does not include shortcuts, nor can entrepreneurs expect a quick return on investment. But that has not discouraged a new generation of distillers from trying their hand at producing small batch bourbons. Stop in at the

**Barrel House**, 1200 Manchester Street or **Bluegrass Distillers** on West Sixth Street, both in Lexington. In nearby Danville, you can tour **Wilderness Trail Distillery**. Also new to the industry: **Three Boys Farm Distillery** and **Glen’s Creek Distillery**, both near Frankfort. The newest to open is **Bourbon 30** in Georgetown. **Castle and Key**, just

down the road from Woodford Reserve, occupies an extraordinary and elegant setting on the grounds that were home to the historic Old Taylor distillery. New distilleries are likely still waiting for their bourbon to age to perfection, but they frequently distill vodka, rum and even moonshine that you can sample, right now!

## A Shot or Two of History

**Where it all began (maybe).** Did a Baptist minister invent Bourbon whiskey? Maybe, maybe not, but it sure does make for a great story.

In Georgetown, north of Lexington, you can see Royal Spring Park, where the Rev. Elijah Craig — described as an “argumentative,” “worldly” and “cantankerous” preacher — reputedly mixed up the first batch of bourbon in the 1780s. While it’s known that Craig definitely produced whiskey (and paper) at the site, some observers of bourbon lore believe that calling him its inventor was simply a late 19th-century marketing ploy to counter the temperance movement.

**Bluegrass Note:** Rev. Elijah Craig also founded Georgetown College. Legend has it that a quart of bourbon reposes under each of the six Ionic columns of the portico of the oldest building on campus, Giddings Hall, built in 1839.

Royal Spring Park is located at Main and Water streets in downtown Georgetown. The Georgetown/Scott County Museum at 229 East Main Street, includes some exhibits about Craig and his papermaking operation. It’s open year round, Wednesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Closed on Sundays. (502-863-6201). Ironically, no bourbon is produced in Scott County today. (Maybe that’s why the chainsaw sculpture of Craig at Royal Spring Park has such a scowl on its face!)

Across the county line in Bourbon County, an early distiller named Jacob Spears is credited with being the first to label his product “Bourbon whiskey.” Spears’ home, Stone

Castle, warehouse and springhouse survive; you can drive by the Spears homeplace on Clay-Kaiser Road.

And now, after ninety five years without a distillery, Bourbon County is home to **Hartfield & Co.** This new small batch craft distillery welcomes visitors. Call (859) 559-3494.

## A schoolteacher's sweet contribution.

Drinking it isn't the only way to enjoy Kentucky bourbon. That's why your bourbon tour of the Bluegrass should also include a trip to the candy shop.

A Kentucky schoolteacher-turned-entrepreneur named Ruth Hanly Booe is credited with inventing bourbon candy. In 1919, she and another teacher, Rebecca Gooch, set up a candy business in the Prohibition-closed bar-room of the Old Frankfort Hotel in Frankfort, Kentucky. The saloon-turned-candy shop was a big success. Ruth became sole owner in 1929. The idea of making bourbon candy supposedly grew out of a chance remark during Frankfort's sesquicentennial celebration in 1936, when a friend of Ruth's pointed out that her mint candy and bourbon were the two best tastes in the world.

Candy made using her secret recipe is still sold by Ruth Booe's descendants at Rebecca Ruth Candies. You can tour the factory at 116 East Second Street in Frankfort (502-223-7475). Bourbon candy also is made at Old Kentucky Chocolates, 450 Southland Drive in Lexington (800-786-0579). The stores are open seven days a week.

## Homeplace of the hatchet lady.

Before you get the idea that *all* Kentuckians have been caught up in the bourbon mystique, you should consider that the Bluegrass region of Kentucky was also the birthplace of America's most famous temperance leader, Carrie Nation, the six-foot, 175-pound woman who, hatchet and Bible in hand, stormed saloons and drugstores across America in the first decade of the 1900s.

She was born Carrie Amelia Moore in Garrard County, south of Lexington, in 1846. You can drive by the stone house where she was born on Fisherford Road.

By the way, although she hated whiskey, Nation was as sentimental as any other Kentuckian when it came to the state's other famous product, horses. She reportedly would often talk race picks with the saloon patrons.

**Bluegrass Note:** Cooking with bourbon is also a Bluegrass tradition. Distillery gift shops, area liquor stores and souvenir shops sell a variety of barbecue and other sauces made with bourbon. While dining in the Bluegrass, you'll find dishes using bourbon on the menus of area restaurants. Look for bread pudding with bourbon sauce- very rich and very delicious.

**Bluegrass Note:** In 1990, when the U.S. Navy's twelfth Trident nuclear submarine was christened the U.S.S. Kentucky, the bottle broken over its prow contained not champagne, but a special blend of eight kinds of Kentucky bourbon.

## The dream of drinks?

You could have guessed that Kentuckians would find a way to combine their two greatest great passions— horse racing and bourbon. The **Mint Julep**, a concoction of bourbon, sugar and mint on crushed ice, is traditionally enjoyed at Kentucky Derby time.

Although the julep didn't originate in Kentucky— several Southern states lay claim to its invention— its connection to the Bluegrass and the Derby secured the drink's place in posterity. "The zenith of man's pleasure... who has not tasted one has lived in vain," Lexington journalist and attorney J. Soule Smith waxed poetic in a sentimental 19th-century recipe. Not all Kentuckians are in agreement on the merits of the julep, however. Famous Louisville newspaper publisher Henry Marse Watterson's classic recipe concludes an elaborate description of preparation with instructions to "toss all the other ingredients out the window and drink the bourbon straight."

You can try a mint julep, especially at Derby time, in many Lexington bars. Area liquor stores carry a variety of pre-mixed versions. The julep even has its own special cup. You'll find silver antique julep cups in Bluegrass antique shops and less expensive new pewter ones in jewelry and other shops.

## Beyond the Bluegrass

You'll find more historic Kentucky distilleries to tour west of Lexington in the Bardstown area. Tours are given at **Maker's Mark Distillery** (off Ky. 52 E near Loretto, KY, about 62 miles west of Lexington; 270-865-2099); and the Visitors Center at **Jim Beam's American Outpost** (Ky. 245 near Clermont, Kentucky, about 50 miles west of Lexington; 502-543-9877). **Heaven Hill Distilleries** (Ky.49, near Bardstown) still bottles whiskey in Bardstown and operates the Bourbon Heritage Center at 1311 Gilkey Run Road. (502- 337-1000). Take a tour and see the world's second largest supply of bourbon. Bardstown is also home to the **Oscar Getz Museum of Whiskey History** (Spalding Hall, North Fifth Street, Bardstown; 502-348-2999). 🐎

**For more information contact VisitLEX at (800) 845-3959.**

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